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Monday, July 13, 1931 U.S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "A Simple Meal for Monday." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletin available: "Cooking Beef According to the Cut."

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"Guess who called up while you were out?" said Uncle Ebenezer as I shut the screen door.

"I can't imagine. It must be somebody nice, though. You're looking very pleased."

"It was the Menu Specialist. She must be a nice person. Intelligent too. She not only has a nice voice but she has so many of the same ideas that I have. You'd be surprised at the way we agree on--"

"Now, please. What did she want when she called up?"

"She wanted to know what kind of a meal you were going to feature today."

"I'll call her right up. Is she at home or in her office?"

"Don't you bother. I have arranged everything. Yes, the meal is all planned and if you'll just sit down comfortably, take off your hat and remove that startled expression, I'll tell you all about it."

I sat down in the nearest chair. I couldn't help myself.

"That's right," continued Uncle Ebenezer. "A simple dinner was what I told the Menu Specialist you wanted. A very simple dinner--perhaps just one of those one-thing meals."

"One-dish meals."

"Please don't interrupt me, Aunt Sammy. Here I am saving you all the bother of planning this meal, and you stop right in the middle and correct me on an unimportant thing like a noun. That's not gratitude. Well, as I was going on to say, I told the Menu Specialist we had to have a simple meal."

"All the housekeepers in this neighborhood are terribly rushed today," I explained to her, "so there's no use planning an elaborate meal, because they just won't bother to get it. Monday is a busy day any way, and beside that our neighbor next door is packing up to go away and the bride across the street is putting up preserves. As for Aunt Sammy, she's at the job of lengthening the skirts of her last summer's dresses to look like this year's

models."

"Uncle Ebenezer," I said sternly, "did you tell the Menu Specialist all the family secrets?"

"Not quite," he replied, beaming at me. "But you know she does have such a nice voice and sympathetic manner over the telephone, that it all tends to encourage confidences."

"Tends to encourage is putting it mildly, I should say. Now what did the Menu Specialist say about the dinner?"

"Wait half a minute. Let me go on with the story and not skip important events. I told the Menu Specialist that if you didn't get to work letting down the hems of your dresses soon next summer would be here and you would have to start turning them back up again."

"'You might think that fixing the hems in a few frocks would be an easy job,' I said to the Menu Specialist. 'But you ought to see the trouble it has given Aunt Sammy. There's that little lavender dress of hers. Remember it? You ought to because she has worn it two years already!'"

"Oh, Uncle Ebenezer--"

"'It faded a little last summer, but that didn't show because the fading was even all over the dress. However, when the hem was taken down, there was a band of deeper color all around the bottom. The dress has to be tinted today and no telling what else.'"

"If the conversation really went on at this rate I don't believe you ever reached the subject of dinner."

"Oh, yes, we did. I'm coming to that. I just wanted to make it plain why your time was filled and why a simple and easy meal was needed. In fact, I suggested, as I told you, one of those -- what do you call them -- one-thing meals."

"One-dish meals."

"That's right. Well, I said, 'How about a one-dish meal? How about cooking and serving the meat and vegetables altogether for the main course?'"

"The Menu Specialist thought that would be fine. She said that kind of a dish was well-adapted to the inexpensive cuts of beef. Of course, they require long slow cooking, but on a busy day, the heavy kettle could be just set on the back of the stove and allowed to simmer away for several hours. No trouble at all. Or there's the pressure cooker to save time and fuel. One of these less tender cuts becomes tender in pretty short order when cooked under pressure. As long as you have the cooker out anyway for canning, why not use it also for preparing dinner?"

"Excellent and sensible ideas --- all of them. But please tell me the menu now. This suspense is too hard on my nerves."

The menu a la Uncle Ebenezer is as follows: Pot Roast of Beef with

Potatoes, Onions and Carrots; Sliced Tomato Salad; and for dessert, Jellyed Fruit. Just three dishes to prepare and all of them easy.

The jellyed fruit can be prepared in the cool of the morning or the night before and left in the refrigerator until it is wanted. Many of the fresh fruits on the market will make a very handsome cool-looking gelatin mixture -- raspberries, strawberries, pitted cherries, sliced bananas or cantaloupe, cut in small cubes or balls. Fresh raw pineapple has to be counted out when it comes to such a mixture. It contains a substance that prevents gelatin from solidifying. Cooked or canned pineapple is all right, but the uncooked fruit or even the juice will keep the mixture soft.

Please now take down your beef leaflet from your shelf of kitchen literature and have a look at page 5. There you will see a picture of the way your pot roast is going to look if you follow the directions. It is a photograph of a pot roast which was prepared at the Bureau of Home Economics. Unless I miss my guess, the Recipe Lady and the Menu Specialist and Miss Alexander, the meat cookery specialist, all had a serving of that roast right after it had its picture taken.

According to the leaflet, the cuts of beef suitable for pot roasting are: chuck ribs, cross arm, clod, round and rump.

Ask the meat man across the counter to cut you a piece from 4 to 6 pounds in weight. That is big enough for a family of six, with some left over for another meal. When it is time to cook the meat, wipe it with a damp cloth. Then rub it with salt, pepper and flour. Put a heavy kettle on the stove -- your iron or heavy aluminum one will be good --- and melt in it about 3 tablespoons of beef fat. Then put in the meat and brown it on all sides.

Slip a low rack under the meat to hold it off the bottom of the kettle and prevent scorching. Add one-half cup of water and simmer until tender.

The time required for cooking will probably be about three hours. During the last hour of cooking the meat, the vegetables should be added to the pot. That is, of course, if you wish them to be served whole or in quarters. Some people prefer them mashed and served as puree in the gravy. In that case they may be cooked longer.

Turn the roast occasionally as it cooks. When the meat is done, make some brown gravy to go with it. First remove the meat from the kettle. Then skim off any excess fat from the liquid and measure the remainder. For each cup of gravy desired, measure 2 tablespoons of fat and return to the kettle. Add 1 and 1/2 to 2 tablespoons of flour and stir until well blended and slightly browned. Then add 1 cup of the meat stock or cold water and stir until smooth. Season the gravy with salt, pepper and chopped parsley. And, of course, serve the roast on a piping hot platter with the vegetables around it.

Tomorrow: Preserving Pointers.

